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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to provide a comparative analysis of the 1984 presidential primary and general election debates, specifically in terms of the formats imposed upon them and the emergent candidate verbal behaviors. Ten Democratic nationally televised primary debates and three bipartisan nationally televised General Election debates were examined, both in terms of their own characteristics and in light of similar debates from past presidential campaigns. The ten Democratic primary debates were the Harvard University Nuclear Arms Control Debate, the Dartmouth College Debate, the Iowa Farm Policy Debate, the Second Iowa Debate, the New Hampshire Debate, the Atlanta Debate, the Columbia University Debate, the Pittsburgh Debate, the Dallas-Fort Worth Debate, and the California Debate. The three bipartisan debates were the Louisville Presidential Debate, the Philadelphia Vice-Presidential Debate, and the Kansas City Presidential Debate. Results make it difficult to determine which debate format--informal or formal--used in either the primaries or the general election debates best showcased candidates' viewpoints. The debates did, however, provide evidence as to the potential for a wide variety of debate formats. (DF)

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The Relationship of Imposed Format Structures and Emergent Candidate Verbal Behaviors: A Comparison of the 1984 Primary and General Election Debates

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to provide a comparative analysis of the 1984 presidential primary and General Election debates, specifically in terms of the formats imposed upon them and the emergant candidate verbal behaviors. Ten Democratic nationally televised primary debates and three bipartisan nationally televised General Election debates are examined, both in terms of their own characteristics and in light of similar debates from past presidential campaigns.

The Relationship of Imposed Format Structures and Emergent Candidate Verbal Behaviors: A Comparison of the 1984 Primary and General Election Debates

On November 8, 1983, approximately one year prior to the 1984 General Election, the Federal Communications Commission ruled unanimously to revise its "equal time" broadcast law so that radio and television stations could stage political campaign debates consisting of candidates of their own choosing, not necessarily providing equal time to all the contenders.

After that announcement much speculation occurred about the future of political debates in general and in particular any that might take place during the 1984 campaign -- specifically, in terms of the likelihood of their occurrence, the number and type of debates (primary versus General Election), the willingness of the candidates to participate in them, the potentially emerging role of the media as sponsors of them, and their possible focus as "entertainment" versus "informational" forums.

In reaction to the revised FCC ruling, Dorothy Ridings, the President of the League of Women Voters, pointed to five potential consequences of the decision during a presentation at the 1983 Speech Communication Association Convention: (a) that separate and independent judgments would not be exercised in the sponsoring and broadcasting of debates (such that decisions about participant and format choices would be difficult to separate from the fundamental decision of whether or not not to broadcast the event); (b) that this policy change could lead to the increased shaping of political candidates and events by the media; (c) that broadcasters might become less receptive to airing debates which were sponsored by organizations other than their own; (d) that broadcasters might become more responsive to the interests of the particular candidates involved (for example, in the negotiation of formats) than in the interests of the public

at large; and (e) that broadcasters might be reluctant to air primary debates, preferring rather to wait until the bipartisan encounters when the stakes would be greater and a larger viewing audience would be assured.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to comparatively analyze the 1984 presidential campaign debates which did occur and were broadcast (with one exception) after the revised FCC policy ruling, specifically in terms of the imposed debate formats and the emergent candidate verbal behaviors. The debates incorporated in the study consisted only of those which were nationally televised during the primary and General Election campaigns: (a) ten Democratic presidential primary debates, held in eight states between October 13, 1983 and June 3, 1984; and (b) three General Election debates in October 1984 at the presidential and vice-presidential levels.

The 1984 Presidential Campaign

The 1984 presidential campaign offered a greatly expanded version of the 1960, 1976, and 1980 debates. In contrast to four nationally televised primary debates in 1976 and five in 1980, ten (starting as early as October of the previous year) were held in connection with the 1984 campaign. In all but one of these debates all of the Democratic candidates in the race at the time participated. Four of the ten primary debates were sponsored by the League of Women Voters, two by national television networks (CBS and NBC), and the others by independent organizations. Two of the primary debates focused on singular specific issues (nuclear arms control and the farm issue), while the eight others were more general in nature.

All three post-convention debates were sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Domestic and foreign policy issues were divided equally as foci of the debates. As was the case in 1976, a single vice-presidential debate was held during the General Election campaign period.

The Democratic Primary Debates

The Harvard University Nuclear Arms Control Debate

Sponsored by the Harvard Institute for Politics and the Massachusetts Citizens Coalition for Arms Control, the first nationally televised debate among the Democratic presidential contenders was held on October 13, 1983 at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its moderator was Peter Mehehan. Seven Democratic candidates participated in the event: former Governor Reubin Askew, Senator Alan Cranston, Senator John Glenn, Senator Gary Hart, Senator Ernest Hollings, former Senator George McGovern, and former Vice President Walter Mondale. No panelists were involved in the debate. The encounter was focused upon a single topic: nuclear arms control.

The sixty-minute debate featured the following six-segment question and answer format: (a) In the initial segment, a single question was asked by the dean of the Kennedy School of Government, the candidates each having an opportunity to respond; (b) In the second segment, seven coalition members addressed a single question to one particular candidate; (c) In the third segment, a second question was posed to all seven candidates by the dean of the Kennedy School of Government; (d) In the fourth segment, seven audience members addressed a single question to one particular candidate; (e) In the fifth segment, the contenders were given the opportunity to cross-examine one another, each being allowed to ask a single question of a particular candidate; (f) In the final segment, candidates offered their closing statements.

Twenty-three questions were posed during the debate. Each candidate was given the opportunity to provide six responses. Though there was a one-minute time limit for responses, no firm enforcement of this limit was imposed. Fixed rotation of candidate response was regulated to ensure equal response

opportunity for the seven contenders. No follow-up questions were featured in this debate, nor were rebuttal opportunities.

Generally speaking, all the candidates were treated equally, though some of the candidates took more advantage of the time available to them. With the six response opportunities given to them, the contenders utilized the following time frames: (a) Askew, a total of 380 seconds, or 63 seconds per message; (b) Cranston, a total of 347 seconds, or 58 seconds per message; (c) Glenn, a total of 375 seconds, or 63 seconds per message; (d) Hart, a total of 381 seconds, or 64 seconds per message; (e) Hollings, a total of 350 seconds, or 58 seconds per message; (f) McGovern, a total of 353 seconds, or 59 seconds per message; and (g) Mondale, a total of 351 seconds, or 59 seconds per message.

This highly structured debate provided for a relatively formal presentation of views. While this debate did not expose viewers to candidate positions on a wide range of issues, it was probably effective in giving them in-depth impressions of their views on a predominant issue of the campaign. The fact that candidates were permitted to cross-examine one another, even on a very limited basis, provided them an opportunity to isolate some contrast among their views. The fact that follow-up questions were not permitted was probably a limiting factor in the debate. Showcasing as many as seven presidential candidates in only an hour may have also been limiting, as evidenced in the fact that each candidate had only six opportunities to convey his views.

The Dartmouth College Debate

The Dartmouth College debate, the second in the series of nationally televised Democratic presidential primary debates, was held on January 15, 1984, approximately one month prior to the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary. Carried over PBS stations across the country and sponsored by the House Democratic Caucus, the debate featured all eight Democratic candidates: Reubin Askew, Alan Cranston, John Glenn, Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson, George

McGovern, and Walter Mondale. Through a somewhat innovative format, two moderators participated in the debate: Ted Koppel for the first half and Phil Donahue for the second half. No panelists were featured in this debate. The longest nationally televised political campaign debate in history, the Dartmouth College event lasted for three hours.

The Hanover, New Hampshire debate offered a relatively open and spontaneous format, one which basically gave wide discretion to its moderators. The eight candidates were interrogated by the moderators; during the Donahue portion of the debate 18 audience questions were posed to the candidates also. The candidates questioned one another only occasionally in their spontaneous exchange of views; no portion of the debate was formally set aside for candidate cross-examination. Closing statements were provided for at the end of the Koppel portion of the debate, though two of the candidates (Hart and Askew) were not provided the opportunity to give them because of time limitations. Follow-up questions were utilized by both moderators. No enforcement of strict speaker rotation was made. The debate did not feature any topic restrictions.

The number of emergent candidate speaking opportunities varied greatly in the debate, as did the total response time and the average time per message. In the Koppel portion of the debate, 79 candidate messages were offered (or 39% of the debate total). These messages consumed a total of 4,425 seconds or 53% of the total candidate time in the debate. The eight candidates presented their views in the Koppel portion of the debate in the following time frames: (a) Askew, seven messages in 360 seconds, for an average of 51 seconds per message; (b) Cranston, nine messages in 560 seconds, for an average of 62 seconds per message; (c) Glenn, ten messages in 608 seconds, for an average of 61 seconds per message: (d) Hart, thirteen messages in 601 seconds, for an average of 46 seconds per message; (e)

Hollings, seven messages in 473 seconds, for an average of 68 seconds per message; (f) Jackson, 12 messages in 717 seconds, for an average of 60 seconds per message; (g) McGovern, six messages in 334 seconds, for an average of 56 seconds per message; and (h) Mondale, 15 messages in 772 seconds, for an average of 52 seconds per message.

In the Donahue portion of the debate, the eight contenders conveyed their positions in the following time frames: (a) Askew, 15 messages in 326 seconds, for an average of 22 seconds per message; (b) Cranston, 16 messages in 439 seconds, for an average of 27 seconds per message; (c) Glenn, nine messages in 484 seconds, for an average of 54 seconds per message; (d) Hart, 14 messages in 324 seconds, for an average of 23 seconds per message; (e) Hollings, 13 messages in 393 seconds, for an average of 30 seconds per message; (f) Jackson, 24 messages in 705 seconds, for an average of 29 seconds per message; (g) McGovern, 12 messages in 470 seconds, for an average of 39 seconds per message; and (h) Mondale, 20 messages in 763 seconds, for an average of 38 seconds per message. In this portion of the debate, a total of 123 candidate messages were offered (or 61% of the debate total). These messages consumed 3,904 seconds or 47% of the total candidate time in the debate.

A total of 202 candidate messages were presented in the debate. The average candidate message during the Koppel portion of the debate was 56 seconds, while during the Donahue portion of the debate, it was only 32 seconds. For the entire debate, the breakdown of candidate messages and time allocations was as follows: (a) Askew, 22 messages (11% of the total) in 686 seconds (8% of the total), for an average of 31 seconds per message; (b) Cranston, 25 messages (12% of the total) in 999 seconds (12% of the total), for an average of 40 seconds per message; (c) Glenn, 19 messages (10% of the total) in 1,092 seconds (13% of the total), for an average of 58 seconds per message; (d) Hart, 27 messages (13% of the total) in 925 seconds (11% of the

total), for an average of 34 seconds; (e) Hollings, 20 messages (10% of the total) in 866 seconds (10% of the total), for an average of 43 seconds; (f) Jackson, 36 messages (18% of the total) in 1,422 seconds (17% of the total), for an average of 40 seconds per message; (g) McGovern, 18 messages (9% of the total) in 804 seconds (10% of the total), for an average of 45 seconds per message; and (h) Mondale, 35 messages (17% of the total) in 1,535 seconds (19% of the total), for an average of 44 seconds per message. As the data indicate, Jesse Jackson and Walter Mondale dominated the available candidate response time.

The Iowa Farm Policy Debate

The third presidential primary debate, held in Ames, Iowa on January 21, 1984, represented a return to a highly structured format and a single focus discussion. Sponsored by Rural America and the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition, the debate featured six of the eight Democratic contenders: Reubin Askew, Alan Cranston, Gary Hart, Ernest Hollings, George McGovern, and Walter Mondale. The moderator was Harold Hughes, former governor of the state. Four panelists participated in the debate: Al Swegle, of the Cedar Rapids Gazette; Gary Lamb, of the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition; Dave Kozishek, of the Iowa Farm Unity Coalition; and Sara Frasher, of Iowa Public Television. The single focus of the debate was on farm policy. The event was broadcast on a delayed basis by Iowa public television stations in the state and by the C-span cable network.

The two-hour debate featured the following seven-segment format: (a) In the initial segment, candidates were given the opportunity to present three-minute opening statements; (b) In the second segment, each candidate was given a single question by one of the panelists and was alloted one minute respond; (c) In the third segment, the candidates were each provided one minute to respond in general to issues brought forth in the previous round; (d) In the fourth segment, each candidate was again asked a single question by one of the

panelists; (e) In the fifth segment, the contenders were each provided a one-minute opportunity to respond in general to issues brought forth in the previous round; (f) In the sixth segment, each of the six candidates was asked to respond to four audience questions which the moderator read from cards; and (g) In the final segment, the candidates were given three and one-half minutes for closing statements.

Sixteen primary questions were incorporated in this debate, four from the audience and twelve from the panel. Two unique features of this debate were the opening statements (one of two debates which featured them) and the two rounds for general candidate comments which allowed for essentially rebuttal opportunities.

The candidates were treated equally, generally speaking, though some candidates took more advantage of the time available to them. Specifically, the contenders utilized their speaking time opportunities as follows: (a) Askew, ten messages in 890 seconds, for an average of 99 seconds per message; (b) Cranston, nine messages in 739 seconds, for an average of 92 seconds per message; (c) Hart, nine messages in 932 seconds, for an average of 117 seconds per message; (d) Hollings, ten messages in 964 seconds, for an average of 107 seconds per message; (e) McGovern, nine messages in 1,000 seconds, for an average of 125 seconds per message; and (f) Mondale, nine messages in 964 seconds, for an average of 121 seconds per message. The variable number of messages per candidate emerged as a result of two extra probes being given to Hollings and Askew by the panel members.

The candidates had four opportunities in the debate to set forth their own "agendas" in sustained form: the opening statements, the two general response rounds, and the closing statements. As was the case with the Harvard University nuclear arms control debate, this farm policy debate limited the opportunity for viewers to obtain candidate position information on a wide range of issues, but rather did allow them in-depth exposure to

candidate views on a single issue, farm policy, one of particular concern to Iowans.

The Second Iowa Debate

The fourth Democratic presidential primary debate was held on February 11, 1984 at the Des Moines Civic Center, nine days before the Iowa caucus of the party. Sponsored by the Des Moines Register, this debate bore some similarity to the first Republican primary debate of the 1980 presidential campaign, for which it was also the sponsor. The moderator once again was James Gannon of the newspaper firm. However, in contrast to the 1980 encounter, there were no panelists in a traditional sense. While the PBS debate broadcast was originally scheduled for two hours, it lasted for two and a half hours. The event featured all eight Democratic contenders.

The debate featured the following four-segment question and answer format: (a) In the initial segment, the candidates were provided the opportunity to present opening statements; (b) In the second segment, the candidates engaged in three rounds of candidate cross-examination (24 questions), in which two-minute response time limits were imposed; (c) In the third segment, five pre-selected community representatives asked questions of the candidates, for which one-minute response times were allocated (the initial interrogator asking a different question of each candidate, the other four asking single questions of all eight candidates); and (d) In the final segment, the candidates presented closing statements.

The eight contenders were treated equally in terms of response opportunity. Each candidate played the respondent role eleven times in the debate. The time consumed by the candidates in conveying their messages varied to some degree, but not by a large margin: (a) Askew, a total of 856 seconds, an average of 78 seconds per message; (b) Cranston, a total of 910 seconds, an average of 83 seconds per message; (c) Glenn, a total of 957 seconds, an average of 87 seconds per message; (d) Hart, a total of 837 seconds, an average of 76

seconds per message; (e) Hollings, a total of 928 seconds, an average of 84 seconds per message; (f) Jackson, a total of 945 seconds, an average of 86 seconds per message; (g) McGovern, a total of 993 seconds, an average of 90 seconds per message; and (h) Mondale, a total of 902 seconds, an average of 82 seconds per message. Overall, the candidates in their 88 messages spoke for an average of 83 seconds.

Probably the most unique aspect of this debate was the allocation of approximately one hour to candidate cross-examination. For this segment, each candidate was provided the opportunity to ask each of three other candidates a single question. In addition, this debate featured opening statements as did the farm policy forum nearly three weeks earlier. This debate did not impose any topic restrictions. For a highly structured debate, this one allowed for the infusion of candidate "agendas" in much of the time allocated through the use of opening statements, a lengthy cross-examination period, and closing statements.

The New Hampshire Debate

The fifth nationally televised debate of the primary campaign was held on February 23, 1984 at St. Anselm College, in Manchester, New Hampshire five days prior to the state's primary. The first debate of the campaign sponsored by the League of Women Voters, it featured all eight Democratic contenders; this was the last debate of the campaign in which all contenders participated together. The moderator was Barbara Walters, of ABC News. No panelists participated in the event, which was broadcast over PBS stations.

The ninety-minute debate featured a relatively open question and answer format under the direction of the moderator. No opening statements were featured; closing statements were allowed. During the body of the debate, the moderator intended to focus upon three areas of concern:

(a) the question most often asked of each individual candidate on the campaign trail; (b) what each candidate would do if he were president; and (c) the qualities of presidential leadership.

Considerable variation emerged in the total time obtained by the eight candidates to convey their positions, the number of messages involved, and, to a lesser degree, the average time utilized by the candidates in each message: (a) Askew, 29 messages in 553 seconds, for an average of 19 seconds per message; (b) Cranston, 17 messages in 399 seconds, for an average of 24 seconds per message; (c) Glenn, 17 messages in 579 seconds, for an average of 34 seconds per message; (d) Hart, 13 messages in 413 seconds, for an average of 32 seconds per message; (e) Hollings, seven messages in 361 seconds, for an average of 52 seconds per message; (f) Jackson, 23 messages in 688 seconds, for an average of 30 seconds per message; (g) McGovern, 15 messages in 558 seconds, for an average of 37 seconds per message; and (h) Mondale, 16 messages in 532 seconds, for an average of 33 seconds per message. By a large margin, Hollings spoke on fewer occasions, but in greater length on an average than his contenders. Askew, on the other hand, spoke more frequently than his adversaries, but with shorter messages. By a similarly large margin, Jackson procured the longest speaking time on the whole of the eight candidates, while Hollings, Cranston, and Hart received the least amount of time.

The Atlanta Debate

The sixth debate of the primary season was held on March 11, 1984 in Atlanta, Georgia at the Fox Theatre, two days before "Super Tuesday" when primaries were held in Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island and caucuses were held in Hawaii, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Washington. Sponsored by the League of Women Voters, the debate carried the potential stakes of 505 delegates, approximately 13% of the total to be in attendance at the Democratic National Convention in July. Broadcast over PBS stations, the debate featured the five remaining candidates

in the Democratic presidential race: John Glenn, Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson, George McGovern, and Walter Mondale. John Chancellor, of NBC News, served as the moderator for the event. No panelists participated in the debate.

The sixty-minute encounter employed a relatively open format, with questions directed to the candidates by the moderator, either on an individual basis or to all of them. Closing statement opportunities were provided to all the contenders. Five general areas of questioning were introduced into the discussion by the moderator: (a) the "Misery Index"; (b) defense spending; (c) a hypothetical situation of a violation of air space by the Soviets; (d) the size of government; and (e) the private sector versus federal programs. No strict speaker rotation sequence was enforced in the question and answer period.

The number of messages per candidate and speaking time per candidate varied greatly, with Mondale speaking for the longest period of time and with Hart getting in the greatest number of messages, but with the lowest average time per message, as reflected in the following data: (a) Glenn, 19 messages in 595 seconds, for an average of 31 seconds per message; (b) Hart, 40 messages in 525 seconds, for an average of 13 seconds per message; (c) Jackson, 15 messages in 514 seconds, for an average of 34 seconds per message; (d) McGovern, 12 messages in 515 seconds, for an average of 43 seconds per message; and (e) Mondale, 29 messages in 651 seconds, for an average of 23 seconds per message.

The Columbia University Debate

Trimmed to only three candidates (Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson, and Walter Mondale), the seventh debate of the primary season was held on March 28, 1984 at Columbia University, six days prior to the New York and Wisconsin primaries. Sponsored by the CBS television network, the debate was moderated by Dan Rather, of CBS News. No panelists participated in the event. The theme of the debate was leadership.

A unique feature of the debate was the seating arrangement of the moderator and three candidates. Like the South Carolina Republican primary debate of 1980, the audience fully surrounded the debate participants. The four were seated at a round table in full view of each other. This arrangement may have intensified the interaction which took place, engendering some confrontational exchanges among the contenders.

The sixty-minute debate featured nine primary questions to all three candidates, as well as closing statements, which were each restricted to two minutes. Though speaker rotation was not strictly enforced, each question was basically asked of each candidate. The number of messages per candidate emerged as almost equal (Hart, 22 messages; Jackson, 18 messages; and Mondale, 19 messages). The total time consumed by each candidate, however, varied more (Hart, 944 seconds, or 43 seconds per message; Jackson, 1,045 seconds, or 58 seconds per message; and Mondale, 1,089 seconds, or 57 seconds per message). The average candidate message lasted 52 seconds; 59 candidate messages were presented.

The fact that the debate had been reduced to three candidates allowed for greater surfacing of issue differences and more direct dialogue among the participants. The semi-structure imposed upon the debate allowed for open expression of positions, but also offered greater assurance to the candidates that relatively equal speaking time would be available to them.

The Pittsburgh Debate

The eighth nationally televised debate of the primary campaign was held at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh on April 5, 1984, five days before the Pennsylvania primary. Featuring the three remaining Democratic contenders, the debate was sponsored by the League of Women Voters. The moderator for the event was author and commentator Elizabeth Drew. No panelists participated in the PBS televised encounter.

The sixty-minute debate featured a relatively open question and answer format under the direction of the moderator. In addition to the questions posed by the moderator, two candidate cross-examination rounds (a total of six questions) were featured, one on domestic policy concerns and one on foreign policy concerns, as well as closing statements. Candidates were cautioned at the beginning of the debate to speak only when addressed, so as to equalize speaking opportunities. The moderator posed follow-up questions on a few occasions to the candidates. Some candidate rebuttal rounds were provided for in the debate format.

A total of 33 candidate messages emerged in the debate, within a total of 2,697 seconds. Each candidate presented 11 messages: (a) Hart in 901 seconds, for an average of 82 seconds per message; (b) Jackson in 853 seconds, for an average of 78 seconds per message; and (c) Mondale in 943 seconds, for an average of 86 seconds per message. Mondale and Jackson differed the most among the three in total time and average time, Mondale consuming more total and average time than Jackson.

The Dallas/Fort Worth Debate

The fourth League of Women Voters Democratic primary debate was held on May 2, 1984 at the Anfac Hotel East in Dallas, two days before the Texas caucus and six days before primaries in Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, and Ohio. The moderator for the PBS broadcast was Sander Vanocur of ABC News. No panelists were featured in the debate. All three of the remaining Democratic contenders participated in the event. No topic restrictions were imposed upon the debate.

The sixty-minute encounter featured the posing of a number of questions to the candidates individually on occasion, but more often to the group as a whole by the moderator on a wide range of issues. Follow-up questions and probes were employed at some points during the hour to elicit more specific information from the candidates. No candidate cross-examination period was offered. The

format did, however, allow for closing statements from the three contenders.

Some variation emerged in the total speaking time utilized by the candidates in conveying their positions and their number of messages, with Jackson obtaining more of each than his counterparts: (a) Hart, 16 messages in 732 seconds, for an average of 46 seconds per message; (b) Jackson, 21 messages in 1,067 seconds, for an average of 51 seconds per message; and (c) Mondale, 17 messages in 841 seconds, for an average of 50 seconds per message.

The California Debate

The final debate of the primary campaign was held on June 3, 1984 at the studios of NBC in Burbank, California, two days prior to the last five primary elections in California, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota, and West Virginia. The sixty-minute debate was moderated by Tom Brokaw, of NBC News. The staging of the event put the three contenders in close proximity with and directly facing their interrogator. No panelists were involved in the debate. No audience questions were permitted in the debate.

The moderator focused upon four general areas, announced at the beginning of the debate, in his line of questioning: (a) what would happen at the upcoming Democratic convention; (b) the future of the Democratic party; (c) the campaign against Ronald Reagan; and (d) what it was like to run for president.

Though the candidates presented approximately the same number of messages (Hart, 15; Jackson, 17; and Mondale, 16), the total number of seconds consumed by the candidates varied greatly. Hart utilized 829 seconds, or 55 seconds per message; Jackson employed 924 seconds, or 54 seconds per message; and Mondale consumed 1,110 seconds, or 69 seconds per message.

The General Election Debate

The Louisville Presidential Debate

The first of the two bipartisan presidential debates between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale was held on October 7, 1984 at the Kentucky Center for the

Arts in Louisville. Televised by the major networks, the debate was moderated by Barbara Walters, of ABC News. Three panelists acted as the interrogators for the debate: James Wieghart, of the Scripps Howard News Service; Dianne Sawyer, of "60 Minutes"; and Fred Barnes, of the Baltimore Sun. Originally scheduled for 90 minutes, the debate lasted 100 minutes.

The debate featured the same format as was utilized in the first half of the 1980 Carter-Reagan debate. Each candidate was given an initial question, to which he had two and a half minutes to respond; then he was given a follow-up question, to which he had one minute to respond; after the opponent was given the same treatment, each candidate was provided a one-minute rebuttal opportunity. Four-minute closing statements were allocated to the two contenders at the completion of eight rounds of panelist questioning.

The focus of this first debate was domestic affairs. The eight main questions, generally speaking, reflected this focus: (a) balancing the federal budget; (b) personal leadership qualitites; (c) the relationship between religion and politics; (d) voter political party shifts; (e) the abortion issue; (f) taxing the middle class; (g) relief to low income groups; and (h) allegations the opponent may have made.

In examining the time frames used by the candidates in their messages, it is important to note that Reagan waved his last rebuttal opportunity just prior to his closing statement. Though this was a highly structured debate, Reagan utilized nearly three more minutes in conveying his positions than did Mondale. For his 24 messages, Reagan consumed 2,379 seconds (39 minutes, 39 seconds), for an average of 99 seconds per message. For his 25 messages, Mondale consumed 2,210 seconds (36 minutes, 50 seconds), for an average of 88 seconds per message.

With one particular exception, the debate format instilled a basic "press conference" strategy, with the candidates directing their responses more to the

panelists who were interrogating them than to each other. The one exception occurred in the course of the candidate rebuttals to the sixth question in the debate which dealt with taxing the middle class. Mondale engaged Reagan in direct confrontation at this point, looking at him and addressing him directly. Few candidate reaction shots were shown to viewers during the debate, adding to the illusion of a "joint press conference."

The Philadelphia Vice-Presidential Debate

The second vice-presidential debate ever to take place on national television was held on October 11, 1984 at the Philadelphia Civic Center between George Bush and Geraldine Ferraro. The moderator for the event was Sander Vanocur, of ABC News. Four panelists acted as interrogators for the event: John Mashek, of U.S. News & World Report; Jack White, of Time Magazine; Norma Quarles, of NBC News; and Robert Boyd, of Knight Ridder Newspapers. The ninety-minute debate was broadcast by all the major television networks. The first half of the debate focused on domestic affairs; the second half focused on foreign affairs.

The same format was employed for this debate as for the Reagan-Mondale encounter four days earlier. Since, however, the single vice-presidential debate was limited to ninety minutes, only four panelist questions were allocated for domestic affairs topics and four for foreign affairs topics.

The eight panelist questions basically reflected the "50-50" split between domestic and foreign affairs: (a) for Bush, his ideological correspondence with his running mate; for Ferraro, her depth of political experience and the apparent voter preference for the Reagan-Bush ticket among females; (b) civil rights; (c) separation of church and state/the abortion issue; (d) the personal income tax returns of both candidates; (e) terrorism policy; (f) the use of military force in Central America; (g) for Bush, Reagan's record on not meeting with Soviet leaders; for Ferraro, the nuclear weapons verification

issue; and (h) for Ferraro, her lack of military experience in light of potentially being the Commander in Chief/the single question she might want to have asked of her opponent; for Bush, the single question he might want to have asked of his opponent.

In examining the time frames used by the candidates in their messages, it is important to note that Bush waved his last rebuttal opportunity just prior to his closing statement. Though this also was a highly structured debate, Bush utilized approximately a minute and a half more time in conveying his positions than did Ferraro. For his 24 messages, Bush consumed 2,095 seconds (34 minutes, 55 seconds), for an average of 87 seconds per message. For her 24 messages, Ferraro consumed 2,002 seconds (33 minutes, 22 seconds), for an average of 83 seconds per message.

With one particular exception again, the debate format imposed a basic "press conference" strategy, with the contenders directing their responses more to the panelists interrogating them than to one another. This exception occurred during the candidate rebuttals to the fifth question which dealt with terrorism policy when Ferraro accused Bush of patronizing her in connection with her level of knowledge about foreign affairs. During this exchange of rebuttals, the two candidates addressed one another directly. Adding to the "press conference" appearance of the debate, the viewing audience was never provided a single candidate reaction shot during the encounter. Substantially fewer opportunities were provided to viewers to see the two contenders simultaneously in a camera shot than in either of the two presidential debates. Once again, the debate was limiting in allowing the candidates to focus their attention on their own "agendas," rather than to those imposed through the panelist questioning.

The Kansas City Presidential Debate

The second presidential debate between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale was held on October 21, 1984 at the Kansas City Municipal Auditorium. Televised

by all the major networks, the ninety-minute encounter was moderated by Edwin Newman, a syndicated columnist and former NBC newsman. The focus of the debate was foreign policy. Four panelists acted as interrogators for the event: Georgie Anne Geyer, a syndicated columnist; Marvin Kalb, of NBC News; Morton Kondracke, of the New Republic; and Henry Trewhitt, of the Baltimore Sun.

The format for the debate was identical to that of the first presidential debate in Louisville and the vice-presidential debate in Philadelphia. Due to time limitations, however, the final round of panelist questioning did not allow for follow-up questions and candidate rebuttals.

The eight main questions basically reflected the foreign policy focus of the debate: (a) Central America (and more specifically, for Reagan, the recent CIA manual incident); (b) for Reagan, his position on the Soviets and his policy on using military force as a function of specific world "hot spots"; for Mondale, his proposal for an annual summit meeting with the Soviets and the question of human rights practices in Eastern Europe; (c) for Mondale, his military force policy and the question of imposing a quarantine around Nicaragua; for Reagan, the failure to successfully fight terrorism in Lebanon during his administration and his terrorism policy in general; (d) for Reagan, the age issue and his policy on land based missiles; for Mondale, the age issue and allegations made by his adversary about his leadership qualities; (e) immigration policy; (f) nuclear weapons technology policy and specifically to Mondale, the issue of nuclear weapons verification; (g) for Mondale, his position on specific defense weapons programs and nuclear weapons verification; for Reagan, future relations with the Philippines; and (h) nuclear weapons policy.

Both candidates had 23 opportunities to convey their positions during the debate. Mondale consumed nearly four more minutes of speaking time in the debate than his counterpart, as well as ten more seconds per message on the average. More specifically, Reagan utilized 1,913 seconds (31 minutes,

53 seconds) for his 23 messages, for an average of 83 seconds per message. Mondale utilized 2,145 seconds (35 minutes, 45 seconds) for his 23 messages, for an average of 93 seconds per message.

As was the case with the other two bipartisan encounters, the Kansas City debate featured little direct confrontational exchange between the contenders. Few reaction shots of the candidates were shown to the viewers, though approximately as many camera shots were provided to the television audience of the contenders simultaneously during their verbalizations as for the Louisville debate. Mondale at least visually engaged his adversary confrontationally when he looked at him for a sustained period of time when providing his rebuttal on the subject of defense policy. But, once again, the format of the event did not encourage direct exchange between the candidates, giving the debate the basic appearance of a "joint press conference."

Discussion

Presidential debates have become an important part of American politics. These events allow the public to view opposing candidates in a single context simultaneously for an extended period of time. For candidates, debates provide an opportunity to reach vast audiences at relatively low cost.

A number of problems have been raised by scholars in regard to past televised political debates, specifically in terms of their formats.[1] First, debates do not serve the public well when they simply encourage candidates to "score" against one another, rather than actually debate about campaign issues. Such an orientation becomes reinforced when the media in attempting to interpret these events for the public describes them in terms of a "winner-loser" outcome. Second, debate formats often encourage the use of "worn commonplaces" by candidates heard frequently on the campaign trail by not allowing sufficient time for well-developed

and thoughtful arguments.[2] Third, true debate is discouraged through the use of panelist questions to the candidates, rather than the posing of propositions. This becomes particularly problematic when their questions seem more directed at "unmasking" the candidates than at simply investigating candidate positions on issues, when their questions seem more directed toward one candidate than both candidates, or when the individual questions are cast in the framework of multiple questions, making it difficult for candidates to respond.

In developing political debate formats, organizers examine a variety of considerations: speaker time, speaker rotation, the use of opening and closing statements, the use of rebuttals and follow-up questions, the selection of moderator and panelists, and the subject matter to be covered. These considerations obviously become vitally important to the candidates involved, since they impact upon their ability to present and defend their own positions, to point out the weaknesses of the arguments advanced by their opponents, and to generate their own agendas. The degree to which candidates can adapt to the constraints of a particular format imposed upon them will reflect upon their ability to effectively perform in the debate context.

The informal debate format can provide the least opportunity for a candidate to "hide" within the structure of a debate so as to evade or ignore open discussion of a complex issue. The informal format, however, legislates the least control of the interaction in terms of equalizing speaking time and regulating speaker rotation. A candidate engaged in informal debate has no guarantee that he will have an equal opportunity with his opponent(s) to convey his positions or express counterarguments.

A formal debate structure offers a candidate at least assurance of equal speaking opportunities with his opponent(s). The informal option, as past history indicates, is not a likely choice in bi-partisan political

debates, since so much is at stake for the contenders.

As was the case for the 1980 presidential campaign debates, the 1984 debates provided a wide range of formats, some more than others perhaps facilitating the verbalization of candidate positions and drawing out contrasts among or between contenders. The rigidity and structure of the three post-convention debates seemed in line with the importance of the bipartisan electoral events with which they were associated. The earlier Democratic primary debates would seem to have had the luxury of being more flexible, experimental, and informal. Ironically, the potential for candidate confrontation because of singular party affiliation would be expected to be less in the primary debates than in the bipartisan encounters, although the relatively unstructured formats evidenced in these pre-convention debates would seem to lend themselves better to greater confrontational discussion through their informality and lack of strict regimentation. The one primary debate in which certainly some confrontational elements were exposed was the Dartmouth College Koppel-Donahue debate in which some candidates stood up extemporaneously and Walter Mondale posed the question "Where's the beef?" to one of his opponents. Demonstration of excessive confrontation in the primary debates may, of course, be somewhat risky from the standpoint of potentially communicating the image of a fragmented party.

It is difficult to determine which debate format utilized in either the primary or General Election debates best showcased the viewpoints of the candidates. Looking at the primary debates alone, it can probably be concluded that as the number of candidates was trimmed down, it became easier to distinguish contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Comparing the 13 1984 presidential debates with the seven presidential debates in 1980 and in particular in view of the 1983 FCC ruling on equal time provisions, the following can be said: (a) twice as many primary

debates occurred during the 1984 campaign than in 1980; (b) the League of Women Voters once again played a major role in the sponsorship of the debates, taking charge of seven of the 13 debates in the 1984 campaign; (c) basically speaking, the 1984 primary debate formats varied widely and were considerably more informal and less rigid than their bipartisan counterparts, much in the same way as the 1980 primary and General Election encounters; (d) traditional panelists were utilized in only one of the 1984 primary debates (in contrast to the majority in 1980), but for all of the bipartisan encounters (as in 1980); (e) candidate cross-examination periods were provided for in three of the 1984 primary debates (the Harvard University nuclear arms control debate, the second Iowa debate, and the Pittsburgh debate), in contrast to none in the 1980 campaign; (f) primary debates in the 1984 campaign lasted up to three hours (the Dartmouth College debate), in contrast to no more than two hours in 1980 (the Iowa debate); (g) moderators for the 1984 debates included a large number of television news anchor personnel or commentators (Rather, Chancellor, Walters, Vanocur, Brokaw, Koppel) and a daytime talk show host (Donahue); (h) two sponsors of the primary debates for 1984 were television networks (CBS and NBC), in contrast to 1980 when no such sponsorship took place; (i) subject matter limitations were imposed upon two of the 1984 primary debates (but on none of the 1980 primary debates) and all three of the 1984 bipartisan debates (as was the case with the 1980 Carter-Reagan debate); (j) audience interrogation of candidates occurred in only three of the primary debates in 1984 (the Harvard University nuclear arms control debate, the Dartmouth College debate, and the second Iowa debate), while it was featured in four out of five of the primary debates in 1980; and (k) while the 1984 primary debates generally favored the comfortable "living room" staging of candidates (except in the Pittsburgh debate where podiums were used), seated in chairs with the moderator, presumably to accentuate the informality of the event, the bipartisan debates relied on the

traditional staging of such events with podiums and a panel seated in the foreground, to reinforce the formality of the encounters.

Because of the highly informal nature of some of the 1984 primary debates, candidate speaking opportunities varied greatly, with the assumed forerunner(s) often obtaining the most time, due most likely to the perceived need to respond to the attacks of others in the forefront of the campaign and the need to establish a clearly delineated line of attack on a future bipartisan adversary. The primary campaign debates may have elevated a new element into presidential debates which had to date only been evidenced in gubernatorial and other lower level debates, that of candidate cross-examination; certainly this feature served to elevate the potential of confrontation in the debates and contributed to a more candidate focused "agenda" into the interaction that took place, rather than one dominated by the "agendas" of the panelists or moderator asking questions. The fact that so many primary debates were televised in 1984, not only nationally, but also locally, suggests that with the imposition of the FCC ruling broadcasters are most interested in providing such telecasts to the public; however, it is important to point out that the majority of the primary debates were broadcast by public broadcasting stations and not commercial networks.

The 1984 presidential campaign debates provided further evidence as to the potential for a wide variety of debate formats. With these debates came some of the more traditional forms seen in 1960, 1976, and 1980, particularly among the bipartisan encounters, and some new innovations which may be worth testing further in a subsequent presidential campaign. Perhaps the most interesting contrasts for the 1984 events were the Dartmouth College debate (with two moderators, three hours, and eight candidates on stage in a highly informal format), the Columbia University debate (with only three primary candidates seated around a round table with the moderator, at least visually staged for confrontation, with an audience surrounding them), and the three bipartisan encounters (following the more traditional televised debate staging and format).

Given the innovations of the 1984 debate forums, it becomes incumbent upon organizers of such events to consider what particular formats are successful in communicating candidate views. The goal is not to find a "perfect" format for presidential debates, but rather to develop appropriate and productive ones for different situations. It is hoped that 1988 will provide the opportunity to further explore such contingent formats and that such debates will continue to play an important role in American politics.

FOOTNOTES

[1] See, for example, Martel, M. (1983). Political campaign debates: Images, strategies, and tactics. New York: Longman; Auer, J. J. (1981). Great myths about the great debates. Speaker and Gavel, 18, 14-21; Friedenberg, R. V. (1979). We are present today for the purpose of having a joint discussion: The conditions requisite for political debates. The Journal of the American Forensic Association, 16, 1-9.

[2] The term "worn commonplaces" is derived from: Bitzer, L., & Rueter, T. (1980). Carter vs. Ford: The counterfeit debates of 1976. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.